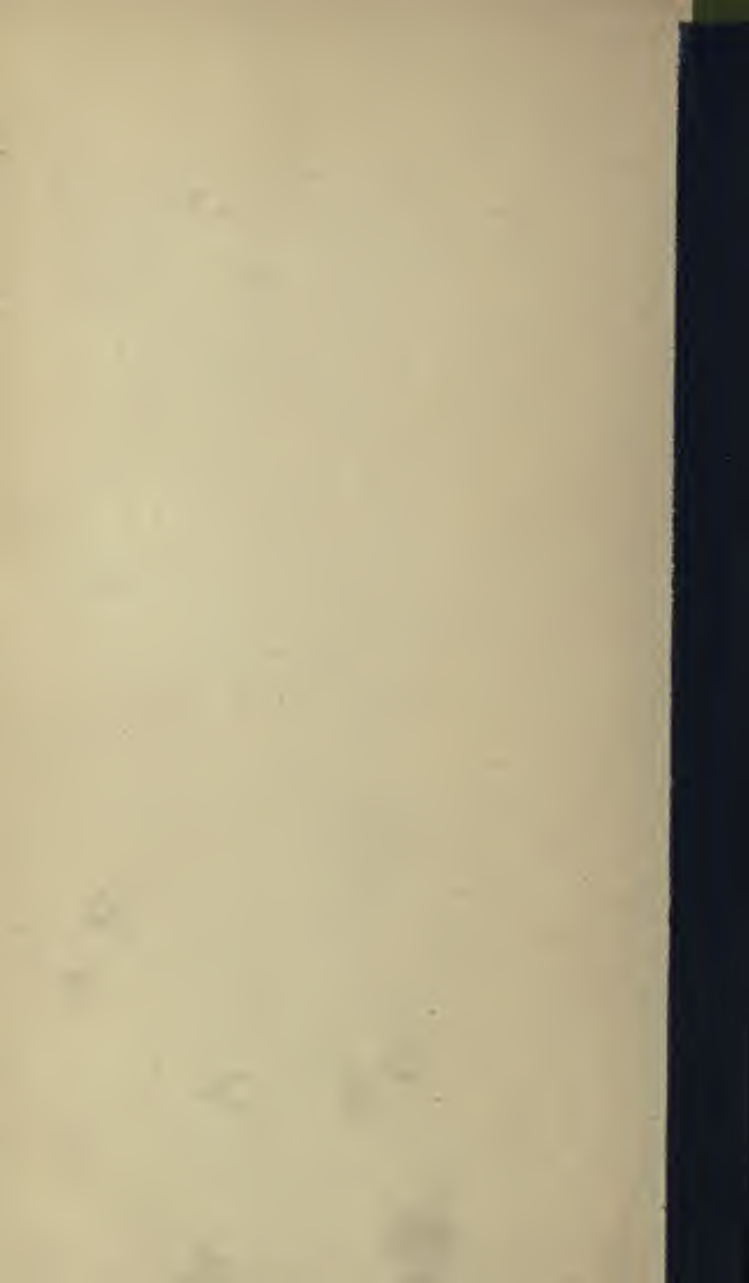
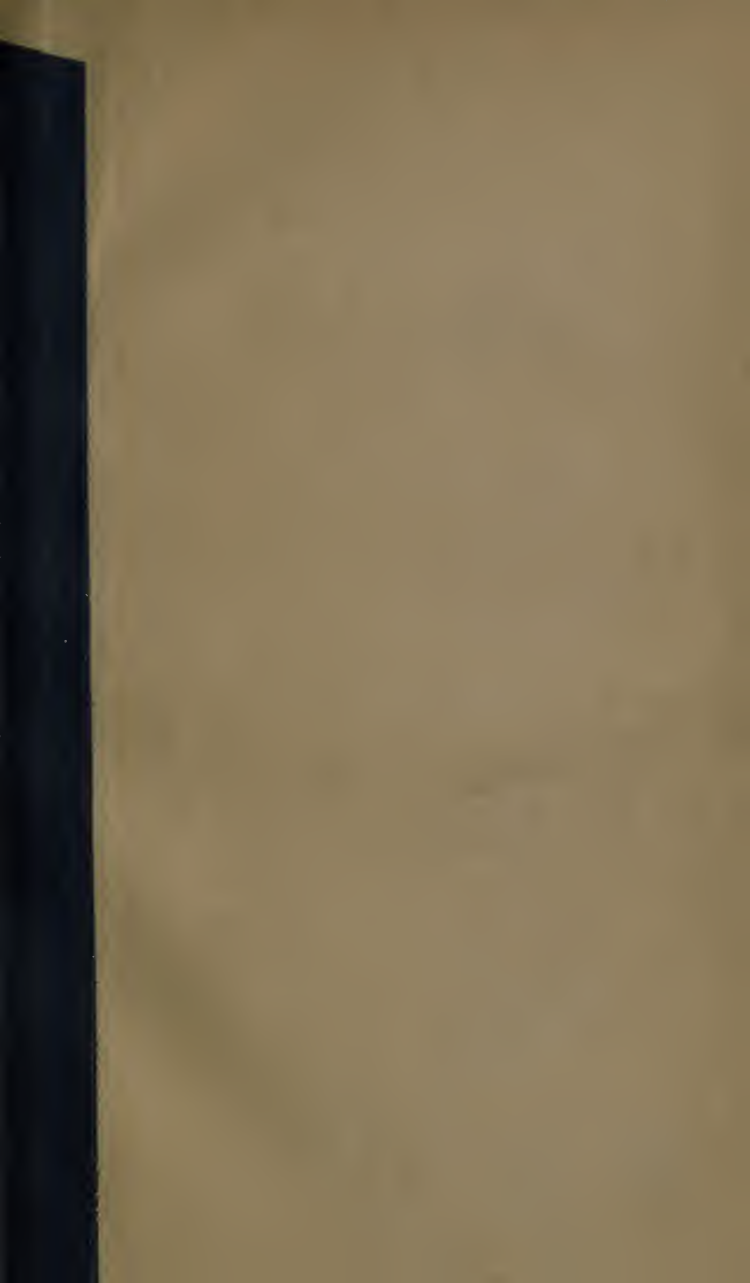


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THE NEW POOR LAW THE POOR
MAN'S FRIEND.

A

PLAIN ADDRESS

TO THE

LABOURING CLASSES AMONG HIS PARISHIONERS,

BY THE

REV. J. H. GURNEY, M. A.

CURATE OF LUTTERWORTH.

THIRD EDITION.

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The References are to the three volumes "published by authority," on the subject of the Poor Laws.

1st. Extracts from the Information collected by the Commissioners.

2d. The Report of the Commission.

3d. The First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners.

These are entitled, for convenience. Vols. I. II. and III.

A
PLAIN ADDRESS,
&c.

THE title of this Address, my friends, will sufficiently explain to you my object in writing it. You have heard people talk about the new Poor Law; and I dare say have had your fears that it would do a great deal of harm to the poor. Now I think I shall be doing you a kindness if I endeavour to quiet your fears, and can persuade you to look for good from it, instead of evil.

I am sure the law was *intended* for your good; and I believe it will *work* for your good; but it is very important to give it fair play at starting, by letting you know what you are to expect from it, and also by setting before you in a plain way, some of the reasons which led the King and the Parliament to pass it.

If you will not listen to what I have to say, and, being already dissatisfied, choose to continue so, you will not be acting the part of reasonable men: if on the contrary, you try to lay aside your prejudices, and judge fairly between the New Law and the Old one, I am sure that you will see there is a great reason to expect that the change will be for your advantage.

I wish to satisfy and convince the quiet, humble man,

who is anxious to know what is before him, and thinks it possible that others may be wiser than himself in a matter such as this, and see further into it than he does ; and I want to show the noisy, talking man, who has a great deal to say about the rich grinding the poor, and taking the bread out of their mouths, that *we* have something to say too, and can prove to those who will *listen*, as well as *talk*, that our rulers have judged wisely for the labouring classes, and dealt kindly with them, when they determined to adopt a different mode of relieving the poor.

You should remember, in the first place, that most of you were very little satisfied with things as they were. If the Government of the country have decided that the old way of going on was a bad one, you seemed a great many of you, a very little while ago, to be of the same mind. You seldom had much good to say of the parish, and often a great deal of harm. I have heard complaints of various kinds, and as I did not encourage you to make them, I dare say there were plenty more which I never heard.

The industrious man, you know, has said that he fared no better than the idle one ; because the latter had but to say that he could get no one to employ him, and then he would have his *money made up*, as it was called, at the week's end, and so be as well off as if he had done a week's work, which might have been got, perhaps, if he had taken much pains to look after it. You have told me yourselves, that the guardians were sadly imposed upon, because some would take the money that was given them for their families straight to the public house, and spend half, or the whole of it, in drink. I have had men pointed out to me, who were often seen in liquor, and who were known regularly to idle

away part of every week, who yet had their rent, perhaps, as regularly paid by the parish; and *that*, you said very truly, was a shame, and ought not to be allowed. People who strive hard to keep things a little tidy and comfortable about them, have said that others, whom they named or hinted at, might do the same, only they preferred making a beggarly appearance, that they might seem the poorer, and be helped the more.

Thus numbers of the most respectable poor have felt wronged by much that they saw among their neighbours. They seemed to think that they had not the return they ought to have for their industry and good conduct. They had indeed a return of another kind, of which none could deprive them. The comfort they had in their earnings was far greater than that which the others had in spending what they ought never to have asked for. But the feeling was a natural one, when they were striving to the utmost for themselves and their families, to regard with something of jealousy the men who did less, and yet appeared to get more. And if persons of this description were dissatisfied with such a state of things, as they had a good right to be, the worthless were far from being content. *They* were the men who had most to say against the parish; for, get what they would, they were always wanting more, and the parish they thought, not their own industry or carefulness, was bound to supply it.

Now I do not say this for the purpose of blaming the persons who have acted hitherto as guardians, and who, at the expense of much time, and for a very scanty remuneration, have had to execute the duties of a difficult and unpopular office. It was their misfortune, not their fault, that they had to administer a bad system, and to dispense relief

under circumstances which made it impossible that they should always do right, or even know what was right. I only beg you to remember how much you had to say against the system which you have been used to; and to reflect that if some change was so very desirable, then it may happen that *this* change will be for your advantage.

But, mind, it is the *best part of the poor* that I expect to profit by it, not the worst. I do not believe the idle man will be better off than he was before, or so well. I do not think it will be so easy to impose upon the parish. The fine times for those who care not how little work they do, or how much parish pay they get, I trust are gone, not coming.—I can hold out no promise to such persons of being gainers by the New Law; except as necessity may drive them to do more for themselves, and to depend less upon others, and then they will be immense gainers, both in comfort and in character.

“If any man will not work neither let him eat,” is the Scripture rule on this subject, and it is meant to keep much more closely to this rule for the future. Men will not be left to starve, or allowed to be in want, any more than they were before; but more care will be taken to give help only to those who really need it. The idle man will not so easily get relief, nor the false man so easily get credit, as he has done. A separating line will be drawn between the parish pauper who loves dependence, and the respectable independent labourer who scorns to beg the bread which he can earn; and thus each will stand before the world in his proper character, and be esteemed according to his worth. All this you will say, is very right; but this, you know very well, has not been effected under the Old Law. It has worked just the contrary way, as is proved by

the evidence which Government have taken pains to collect from every part of the country, and from all sorts of persons, upon this subject. A great deal of this goes to prove that the Old Law was bad for the poor; and as it is *poor* men that I am talking to just now, the best thing, I think, for me to do, will be to bring together, in a short compass, some parts of it which shew us this most plainly. You will then see more clearly than you do now what the evil was for which a remedy was wanted, and will understand what I mean, when I say that I hope the change will do *you*, (working men, I mean, who live by the labour of their hands) a great deal of good.

When I say that the Old Law has hurt the poor man, I mean that it has injured his *character*; and every thing that does *that* is really an enemy to him, and a very dangerous one, whatever face or form it wears.

What so important, for instance, to the poor man, as HABITS OF INDUSTRY? *Without them* he cannot prosper, and no help that he gets from public or private charity will supply their place. The gift he receives to-day is gone to-morrow, and, when it is spent, leaves him as poor as ever. But the disposition to labour with contentment and cheerfulness is a lasting source of comfort and happiness. It is like a store, to which he may repair day by day, and year by year, and find it unexhausted at last. Now Industry has been cramped, and fettered, and robbed of its due reward, by the operation of the Poor Laws. Upon this

point the following evidence, *furnished by labourers themselves*, is sufficiently decisive.

“*J. Stanton*, aged fifty, was a married man, had no children at present, he was tenant of half an acre of land; he stated that it never took him from his other work, as, if he had much to do, he got some single man to work for him, as there were always some unemployed; the farmers always preferring to employ the men with large families to keep them off the parish. One of the gentlemen present asked this man whether he would not prefer to see a man get employment who had children to support, than a single man who had only himself to provide for; his answer was in these words:—‘To speak openly, Sir, I consider that a man ought to be paid for his work, and not for his family; and that if I had done a good day’s work, I should sooner have the value of it myself than see another man paid because he has got children.’ He was then asked if he had heard of men marrying with the view to obtain regular employment from the farmers, or more relief from the parish; he said, ‘There are many, Sir, who do think that they shall be better off if they have a family, and I have heard them often say so.’ He was asked if the labourers thought that the more industrious they were, the more encouragement they would receive; ‘No, they do not do that, because we see many a man get parish pay whether he is industrious or not.’ He continued, ‘But, Sir, what is the use of a man working hard if he has got no master to oblige, paid half by the parish and half by the farmer? How would a man be better off if he were to work ever so hard? It would be better for us to be slaves at once than to work under such a system.’ I asked him if some of the labourers did not prefer the system as a means of being idle, or of only doing half a day’s work; he said he believed that might be the case sometimes, and added, ‘Where is the wonder? *when a man has his spirit broken, what is he good for?*’”*

Thomas Pearce, of Govington, in Sussex, labourer, examined.—“In your parish are there many able-bodied men

upon the parish?"—"There are a great many men in our parish who like it better than being at work."

"Why do they like it better?"—"They get the same money, and don't do half so much work. They don't work like me; they beant at it so many hours, and they don't do so much work when they be at it; they're doing no good, and are only waiting for dinner-time and night; they beant working, it's only waiting."

"How have you managed to live without parish relief?"—"By working hard."

"What do the paupers say to you?"—"They blame me for what I do. They say to me, 'What are you working for?' I say, 'For myself.' They say, 'You are only doing it to save the parish, and if you didn't do it, you would get the same as another man has, and would get the money for smoking your pipe and doing nothing.' *'Tis a hard thing for a man like me.*"

"If you want any thing from the parish, should you get it sooner than a man who has not worked so hard?"—"No, not a bit; nor so likely as one of those men."

"What would they say to you?"—"They would say that I didn't want it, and that I had a piece of ground, and was well off. They're always giving to men who don't deserve it, whilst they are refusing to those who do."

"Is it worse in your parish than in others?"—"No, it is the same in them all. There is partiality everywhere. If I was to offend my master, and he was to turn me away, none of the others would give me work; and if I go to the parish, they would put me on the roads. There's not one in our place that looks on me the better for my work, but all the worse for it."

"What would be thought of a plan, of making all go either wholly on or wholly off the parish, so that the men should not be paid half in wages and half as a pauper?"—"I do not know; but my master (Mr. Noakes) says, that he would take his full part of men; I think it would make the farmers keep more men for constant, which would be a good thing, as they would find more work for them. The land is not near done here as it should be, for want of hands." *

Another labourer gave the following evidence:—

“He was sixty-eight years of age, and received 4s. a week from the parish for working on the roads. He did not complain, because there were such numbers on the parish. The reason was the young folks *married up so terrible early in these days*, thinking they should get more regular employment. He remembered a very different state of things; when the farmers preferred single men, who lived in the house with them, and did not marry till they had got a character as good workmen, and put by some of their earnings; then ‘if any man applied to the parish, he was pointed at as a *parish bird* ;’ but it was very different now.”*

The two succeeding extracts are from the Report of Mr. Hall, the gentleman who has so ably and satisfactorily fulfilled the duties of Assistant Commissioner in this neighbourhood.

“The following conversation took place between the overseer of Boarstall, in Buckinghamshire, and myself: “Do you employ many regular men?”—“Yes, sir, several.”

“And many roundsmen?”—“Too many by half, sir.”

“Do you pay all alike?”—“Yes, sir, I give every man his right price.”

“How many hours a day do the regular labourers work?”—“I have a large dairy, and they must be at their milking soon after five in the morning, and again at six in the evening, so that they remain at this time of the year about 13 hours.”

“And the roundsmen, when do they come and go?”—“I cannot get them before eight or nine in the morning, and they are all off in the afternoon, between three and four: their work is worth nothing, while they are with me.”

“And they are paid like the rest?”—“Just the same, sir, according to their price.”

“Does the number of men on the round increase or diminish?”—“There are more and more every year, sir.”

“Then, I suppose, the labourers of your parish do not improve?”—“Improve, sir! they keep on getting worse,

and *unless you do something for us, I expect they will soon give up work altogether.*"

"In the parish of Brightwell I passed six or seven men professedly working on a road, about ten o'clock in the morning: returning about four in the afternoon, I found them reposing in various attitudes near the spot where I had seen them before. After some introductory observations, I asked, "Do you think you earn your money at this work?"

"If I do," said one, "it is by walking here and back morning and evening."

"Why, do you do the road no good?"—"Not a morsel, sir, I think we rather do it harm."

"Then what do you think you are put here for?"—"Oh, sir, we know the overseer only puts us here to *suffer* (meaning, I suppose, punish) us, and I have often told him he had better give us our money for nothing."

"But why not get employment from the farmers?"—"The farmers will not give us any just at present, they keep us here like potatoes in a pit, and only take us out for use when they can no longer do without us."*

A magistrate in Sussex thus replies to the question, "Could a poor man lay by any thing?"

"If the single man could procure regular work, and could be induced to lay by as he ought to do, I think an industrious man might in a few years secure an independence at the *present* wages of the country; but if an industrious man was known to have laid by any part of his wages, and thus to have accumulated any considerable sum, there are some parishes in which he would be refused work till his savings were gone; and the knowledge that this would be the case acts as a preventive against saving."†

How truly this witness spoke will appear from the following story related of himself by a gentleman whom I know very well.

"Mr. Nash, of Royston, is proprietor and occupier of a farm containing 150 acres, situated in two neighbouring

* Vol iii. p. 212.

† Vol ii. p. 78.

parishes, Barkway and Reed. He employed six men (to whom he gives throughout the year, 12s. a week), two boys, and six horses. In 1829, Mr. Clarke, the overseer of Reed, told Mr. Nash he could no longer collect the money for poor-rates, without resorting to coercive measures, which he would not do; and that the unemployed poor must be apportioned among the occupiers of land, in proportion to their respective quantities; and that he (Mr. Nash) must take two more men. All Mr. Nash's labourers had been some years in his service, and were steady, industrious men, and he regretted the necessity of parting with any of them. The two men displaced were those who came last into his service, and for that reason only. One was a parishioner of Royston, an excellent workman at any kind of work. He lived near Mr. Nash's house (a great convenience), and his wife superintended a small school Mrs. Nash had established for the benefit of her poor neighbours. The other was John Watford, a parishioner of Barley, a steady, industrious, trustworthy, single man, *who by long and rigid economy, had saved about £100.* Of the two men sent in their stead one was a married man, with a family, sickly and not much inclined to work; the other, a single man, addicted to drinking. On being dismissed, Watford applied in vain to the farmers of Barley, for employment. *It was well known that he had saved money, and could not come upon the parish, although any of them would willingly have taken him had it been otherwise,* Watford has a brother also, who, like himself, *has saved money:* and though he has a family, and has been laid aside from work for six years, has received no assistance from the parish. After living a few months without being able to get any work, he bought a cart and two horses, and has ever since obtained a precarious subsistence, by carrying corn to London for one of the Cambridge merchants; but just now the current of corn is northward, and he has nothing to do; and *at any time he would gladly have exchanged his employment for that of day labour, if he could have obtained work.* No reflection is intended on the overseers of Barley; they only do what all others are expected to do; though the young men point at Watford, and *call him a fool for not spending his money at a public-house, as they do; adding, that then he would yet work.*" *

Now these statements, you see, are collected from persons in very different situations of life, yet all of them having had the opportunity, in one way or other, of watching the effect of the Poor Laws upon the condition and habits of the poor. And now I appeal to you as reasonable men, Is there not a great deal here that wants correcting? Is not that a bad system—bad, I mean, *for you*—which confounds the evil and the good; which, in many instances, favours the idle at the expense of the industrious; which makes it hard, very often, for the man who loves work to get it on any terms, and easy for another who hates it to get pay without it; which makes the best men, sometimes, the sport of the worst; which reverses the common order of things, and lets prudence appear as folly; which assaults, and too often breaks down, the honest pride of the man who will labour *while he can*, and beg only *when he must*?

PRUDENCE AND ECONOMY AT HOME, we may say again, are *essential to the poor man's comfort*. If industry is of use in *getting* his money, care in *saving* it, and care in *spending* it, are just as needful, when it is got. These make all the difference, commonly, of a comfortable or uncomfortable home; and the pleasanter he finds his home, the more secure is he against some of his commonest temptations. They give him to see more of the fruit of his labour, and that makes him labour more steadily and more cheerfully. But the Poor Laws, instead of making men careful and prudent, have tempted, and almost *bribed*, them to be otherwise. When relief was to be had for asking, and the shame of asking for it was gone, it was natural for them to forget the future, and think only of the present. The parish was their

store to apply to when they chose, and there was no occasion therefore, they thought, to make another for themselves.

The following witnesses give the result of their observations on this point :—

Mr. John Coste, relieving overseer of St. Leonard, Shore-ditch, says,

“ We have frequently amongst our paupers, mechanics who obtain very high wages during particular periods, and when work fails, immediately come upon the parish. These men are, generally speaking, the greatest drunkards. I formerly carried on the business of a willow-square maker, and have paid as much as £4. or £5. a week to particular men for months together. I do not believe that one of these men ever saved a pound. Several of them are now in the work-house, who might have provided for themselves by means of savings' banks, until they got some other description of profitable labour.” *

Two other persons of large experience, who, from filling parish offices have had the opportunity of seeing a great deal of the habits of the poor, speak of them as follows :—

“ We have had many shoemakers who might have saved enough money when *in work* to keep them from the parish when they are *out of work*. Amongst the tailors are many who might save money. Some of them on the parish are very good workmen, who could earn about 6s. a day. One of them now on the parish is said by persons in the trade to be one of the best workmen in London. He is just now out of the tread mill for neglecting his family. The greater part of sawyers could save enough to keep them from the parish during the intervals of work. Before the saw-mills were established, a pair of sawyers have, during the whole year, earned £5. a week; they have acknowledged to me that when they were earning money they have never taken their families more than a pound a week regularly; they

have paid rent and bought coals besides; but they have themselves lived at the public house with the rest of their money."*

"Amongst the able-bodied labourers are many brick-makers, men who, during seven or eight months in the year earn very high wages. They drink much beer, and perhaps their labour requires it; but they might out of their wages, wholly or in part, make provision for the winter, if they were so inclined. But they spend all; and throw themselves upon the parish as a customary thing. Formerly their wives have made small deposits in the savings' banks, to provide for their confinement, or the payment of their rent in the winter, unknown to their husbands. If their husbands knew they had the money, they would force it from them. I was a member of the savings' bank, and have seen the poor women bring their little pittances there. They have besought me to keep it secret from their husbands."†

How plainly do such facts prove that to grant relief as easily as it *has been* granted is no kindness to the working classes! Here are men with a larger yearly income than many persons in the rank of gentlemen, and instead of living in credit and respectability, they remain only just above want; they are *wealthy* one part of the year, and *paupers* the other; instead of being the better for their extra earnings, they are corrupted and ruined by them.

These, I know, are extreme cases; and it is but very few who ever have the chance to get so much as these men do, or to save so much as they might have done. But the smaller the stock is, the more necessary is it to look well after every penny; and no man is so likely to do this as the man who knows every week what he has to trust to, and who works for all he gets. We all of us know of cases in which persons helped by the parish seemed to be not a bit better

* Vol. ii, p. 332-3.

† Vol. ii. p. 333.

off than others who got nothing, and whose means were the same. We have all of us seen men with large families who looked always decent and comfortable, and others, with smaller families, always apparently in want—and a good, careful, managing wife, perhaps, has made all the difference between the two. Prudence has done more for the one, than parishes, even when most generous, have been able to do for the other. If prudence, therefore, does not come naturally to those to whom it is so necessary, it is well they should be taught it. The law is sure to be a bad one, and, for their sakes, ought to be put away as fast as possible, which helps them to do without it.

HONEST PRINCIPLES are yet more important to the poor man's happiness ; and these too have been sadly corrupted by increased habits of dependence among the labouring classes

The following is an extreme case, but may serve to show the kind of abuses which have been practised in populous places, and the manner in which parishes have been plundered by the shameless and unprincipled. It is narrated in the evidence of an overseer of one of the London parishes,—

“ Some time ago there was a shoemaker, who had a wife and family of four children, who demanded relief of the parish, and obtained an allowance of 5s. per week. He stated that he worked for Mr. Adderley, the shoemaker, who now lives in High-street, in the Borough. The man stated, in applying for relief, that, however he worked, he could earn no more than 13s. per week. A respectable washerwoman informed me, that the way in which this family lived was such, that she was convinced the man earned enough to support them honestly without burthening the parish, and that it was a shame for him to receive relief. In consequence of this information I objected to the allowance ; but one of the overseers, taking up the book, said ‘ But here is

the account, signed by Mr. Adderley himself; can you doubt so respectable a man?' Still I was not satisfied; and I watched the man, and found him going to Mr. Pulbrook's, in Blackfriars' road. When the man quitted the shop, I went in and asked whether the man who had just left worked for them. Mr. Pulbrook stated that he did work for them, and had done so during the last twelve months; that he was one of the best shoemakers who had ever worked for him; that he earned only about 12s. a week, and that he (Mr. Pulbrook), regretted he had not more work for him. The man had left his book, which I borrowed. When the man came to the board, I said to him, 'Do you know Mr. Pulbrook, of Blackfriars' road; 'Yes, I do, very well.' 'Do you ever work for him?' 'I have done a job now and then for him.' I then asked whether he had not earned as much as 10s. or 12s. a week from him. His reply was, 'No, never.' I then produced the book between him and Mr. Pulbrook, from which it appeared that he had earned from 10s. to 12s. per week, for the time stated. This took him by surprise, and he had no answer to make. The relief was refused him, and he never came again. I afterwards ascertained, that, in addition to the 13s. a week, which he earned from Mr. Adderley, and the 12s. a week which he earned from Mr. Pulbrook, his wife and himself worked for Mr. Drew, the slopseller, living at Newington Causeway, and earned 7s. a week from him. On the average of the year round, they did not earn less than 30s. per week. The man was afterwards spoken to about the loss of the parish allowance, when he said,—'I did not like to lose it; it was a very hard case; *it was like a freehold to me, for I have had it these seven years.*' " *

The same gentleman furnishes the following information, which is highly important as shewing the necessity of offering some check to an evil which threatens to overrun the whole labouring population, and to eat up the resources of the whole country:—

"In answer to the question, whether the practice of obtaining out-door relief was extending among respectable

* Vol. i. p. 211-12.

mechanics, he replies, 'I am every week astonished by seeing persons come, who I never thought would have come. One neighbour brings another. Not long since a very young woman, a widow, named Cope, who is not more than twenty years of age, applied for relief; she had only one child. After she had obtained relief, I had some suspicion that there was something about this young woman not like many others. I spoke to her, and pressed her to tell me the real truth, as to how so decent a young woman as herself came to us for relief. She replied that she was '*gored*' into it. That was her expression. I asked her what she meant by being *gored* into it. She stated, that where she was living there were only five cottages, and that the inhabitants of four out of five of these cottages were receiving relief, two from St. Saviour's and two from Newington parish. They had told her that she *was not worthy of living in the same place*, unless she obtained relief too. I was completely satisfied of the truth of her statement by inquiry. Her candour induced me to give her 5s. and I offered her a reception in the house for herself and child. The consequence was, we never heard any more of her."*

The following instances, furnished by the Commissioner who has visited Sussex, will prove that some of the country rogues have been quite as successful in the work of parish robbery as the London ones :

"Edmund Etherington, of Lurgashall, was on the parish for sixteen years, receiving relief in rent and money for his children during the whole of that time. From inquiries made by the parish officers, as to his ability to maintain himself, it was determined that his pay should be stopped. This was not done without frequent applications, on his part, to the bench; being, however, at length convinced that he had no chance of any thing more from the parish, he produced money sufficient to stock a small farm, for which he is now rated in the parish books in the sum of £12. 2s. 6d."

"Thomas Copeland, of Woolbeding, had been receiving relief for twenty years. A more accurate investigation as

to his circumstances being made, it was discovered that he possessed ample means of keeping himself, and his pay was, in consequence, at length stopped. He has since *bought two houses, with half an acre of ground, worth from £120. to £130.* and has maintained himself respectably ever since." *

These, it will be acknowledged, are gross cases. I do not suppose that such frauds are common, but dishonesty on a smaller scale has been common enough. Every man who applies for relief, we must remember, professes to be in want of it; and if he be not in want, and gets relief, is guilty of imposing upon *the parish*. And *the parish* is not as some people seem to think, a very rich body, living in the work-house, or nobody knows where, with such plenty of money that there is no getting to the bottom of his hoard, and able, therefore, to feed a hundred or a thousands mouths without being any the poorer. The parish is nothing but the united contributions of all who pay rates, put into a common fund for the relief of the poor. The poorest rate-payer, let me tell you, pays his share of the smallest sum that is given to every pauper; and the poorest rate-payer, therefore, is wronged by every neighbour who gets a shilling from the parish without necessity. We hear a good deal sometimes about the grievous sin of *robbing the poor*; and a grievous sin it is, whoever is guilty of it. But we must remember that the poor may be robbed *by the poor*, and this wholesale robbery of the poor rate-payer has been too little thought of.

FAMILY AFFECTION is another grand source of happiness to the poor man; a precious treasure, indeed, it is to any man, but doubly precious to those whose comforts are comparatively few, and whose trials and burdens are many. How

painful then, and how full of warning, are the following brief but expressive notices upon this point! How lamentably must vicious customs, and the force of evil example, have blunted and deadened the kindest feelings of our nature, when such cases are of frequent occurrence, and cause no surprise!

At one place in Buckinghamshire, the following entries appeared in the Parish Book;—

“Samuel Simmon’s wife applied to be allowed something for looking after her mother, who is confined to her bed; the mother now receives 3s. 6d. weekly. To be allowed an additional 6d. for a few weeks.”

“David Walker’s wife applied to be allowed something for looking after her father and mother (old Stevens and his wife), now ill, who receives 6s. weekly. To be allowed 1s. weekly.”

“Mary Lacey applies to have something for waiting on her mother, now ill. Left to the governor.”

“Elizabeth Prime applies to have something allowed for her sister looking after her father, now ill. Left to the governor.” *

At another place in Buckinghamshire similar items of expenditure were found:—

To Elizabeth W. a present for kindness to her father, 5s. 6d.”

“Mary B. for sitting up at nights with her father, 2s. 6d.”

And the overseer’s wife, herself a mother, saw nothing wrong in this, “For” she said, “it was a great hindrance for children to be dutiful to their old sick parents”†

The following scene occurred before the Board of Guardians, at Farringdon, in Berkshire:—

“A woman, able-bodied, with two children, applied for relief. It appeared that she earned 3s. 6d. a week, and one

* Vol. ii. p. 97.

† Vol. iii. p. 185.

of the children, aged twelve, earned 3s. more; the other child was seven years old. Under these circumstances relief was refused. On hearing the decision she exclaimed, "It is a hard case for we poor mothers to have to work for our children." *

In the books of another parish, the following items appear:—

"Richard Shilton, five days, looking after his family, 5s.

"A. Gibbs, looking after his wife, 6s." And this last entry appears every week for a whole year. †

The last tie of nature that will break is commonly that which binds the mother to her child; yet even this, we find, can give way under the corrupting influence of the Poor Laws.

"A widow with two children had been in the receipt of 3s. a week from the parish (of Over, in Cambridgeshire). She was enabled by this allowance and her own earnings to live very comfortably. She married a butcher; the allowance was continued; but the butcher and his bride came to the overseer and said, 'They were not going to keep those children for 3s. a week, and that if a further allowance was not made, *they should turn them out of doors*, and throw them on the parish altogether.' ‡

Well might one of the Commissioners observe, upon entries such as these in Parish Books, that the effect of the Poor Laws has been to lead persons to ask, without scruple, to be paid for the performance of those domestic duties, which even savages will render *for nothing* to their own kindred.

And now, my friends, need I say more, or quote more, to show that the effect of the Poor Laws, as they *have been* administered, is very injurious to the comfort and character

* Vol. iii. p. 184.

† Vol. iii. p. 186.

‡ Vol. ii. p. 96.

of the poor man ; that in many places they are making sad inroads upon the noble and manly qualities which once distinguished the English labourer ? Under the guise of a friend they are plundering him of his best treasure. They tempt him to cringe and beg, instead of cheerfully “going forth to his work and labour in the morning,” and laying his head at night upon his pillow with the comfortable reflection that what he has is his own, and that he stands indebted for it to none but the God who gives him health and strength. They come to him with the bribe of a little present relief, which in his poverty he would be more than man if he could always resist ; and for that in many cases they induce him to sell his independence, his self-respect, his integrity, his kind-heartedness, and (need we say ?) with all these, his comfort and peace of mind.

I know that you will be ready to reply to these statements, by saying that things have not been so bad among us, and I rejoice to say that they have not. I am glad and thankful that so many of you remain uncorrupted by a corrupting system ; and I can testify moreover that many who have been compelled by necessity, or induced by the example of others, to apply for relief, and so became partly dependent upon the parish, do not love their condition, and would gladly escape from it, if they saw a fair prospect of being able to maintain their families without help.

But the prudent physician does not deliberately wait till the sick man is almost gone before he begins to prescribe for him ; and it will not be wise in us to wait till matters have got to the worst before we try to make them better ;

till the whole country becomes like *Cholesbury in Buckinghamshire*, where, in the year 1832, the farmers, unable any longer to support the burden of the poor rates, all threw up their land, and for the whole labouring population there was no work, no wages, and *no parish*.* We must take the disease in time, and apply the remedies before recovery is hopeless. "But then it is a bad remedy," you will say, "to begin by being hard upon the poor; that will make things worse, not better." Now you shall judge, my friends, whether the adoption of a stricter rule in the administration of relief is any hardship to the poor. It has been tried in some places, and you shall hear the result.

The following is an extract from the evidence of the Rev. Mr. Whately, Vicar of Cookham, in Berkshire, given before the House of Lords in the year 1831.

"Are there many people out of employment in your parish?"—"I think, in the course of the year, there have been perhaps from six to ten, or it may be a dozen."

"Able-bodied men?"—"Able-bodied men. I think I have rather over-stated that; perhaps I might say eight, during the frost, and while the snow was upon the ground."

"Do you consider that the labouring classes are well off in your parish?"—"I think they are better off than I have ever seen them since I have known them."

"Do you attribute that to the good management of the parish?"—"I do."

"Have you prepared any statement upon that subject?"—"I have."

"Have the goodness to read the same?"—"The system of management introduced by the Select Vestry of the parish of Cookham has been attended with very beneficial effects both to the rate-payer and to the poor. To the former it has saved in eight years up to Lady-day last, compared with the preceding eight years, no less a sum than

fifteen thousand pounds. To the latter it has been equally beneficial, by introducing habits of frugality, industry and providence, which have been strongly marked by their beneficial effects. Only one bastard child has been registered in either of the two last years. The system is simple, and may be accommodated to the circumstances of most agricultural parishes. Its leading features are the employment of the able-bodied poor, who apply for relief, at low wages and at hard work by the piece, showing them that the parish is the hardest taskmaster and the lowest paymaster they can apply to. Never giving any thing in aid of labour, rent, or rates. Dividing the paupers in the workhouse into two classes; the old, infirm, and impotent form the first; the idle, improvident, and vicious constitute the second. To the former is allowed an ample supply of butcher's meat and other suitable food; to the second class nothing but bread and cheese. None are allowed to absent themselves from the workhouse, or to receive visitors within its walls, without an express and written order from an overseer. The poor of Cookham have subscribed during the last summer a large sum for the purchase of coals, which were delivered to them in November. They have purchased linen, calico, and other clothing during the year, at prime cost, to the amount of £160. The Friendly Society (which insures to a subscribing member during sickness 8s. a week, and £5. for the funeral in case of death,) consists of about 100 members. To a Penny Club, within the year, in the village of Cookham and its immediate neighbourhood, has been subscribed £48.; and the contributions to the Saving Bank have been uniform and regular, and amounted at Lady-day last to the sum of £3 544. 7s. 1d."

"The population of that parish is not beyond the means of employment?"—"There are very few out of employment now, but *there used to be sixty before the Select Vestry.*"

"Do you consider that the Select Vestry has had beneficial effects upon your parish?"—"It has reduced the rate from about £3,000. to £1,100."

"Has your parish appointed a permanent overseer?"—"Yes."

"Do you find that very beneficial?"—"Very much so; and the workhouse is very beneficial too, for we find very few of the poor like to come into the workhouse, who would try every trick to get a weekly allowance in money."

“Do they pay their rents out of their wages?”—“Yes ; *they have no assistance from the parish ; and they all pay the poor rate.*”

“You have said that you think there were a greater number of poor out of employ before the Select Vestry than now ; how do you conceive that the Select Vestry have provided employment for them?”—“They have provided employment by setting them to hard work, at low wages, by the grate. The consequence was that they found work for themselves. We gave them a piece of ground to trench, hard gravelly ground ; and many of the farmers thought we should trench the whole parish : but I believe we never trenched quite half an acre.”

“As soon as they were sent to work they went away and got work?”—“Yes. There was one man, who was a postillion, and he was about sixty years old, with a very short jacket and a plaited shirt ; he had married a bar-maid of about eighteen, and had one child ; and he came to the parish for relief, expecting to have a weekly allowance. We asked him how he came to be out of employment ; he said he had had a few words with his master. We recommended him to have a few more, and to try whether he could not make up the difference, for we had nothing for him except some trenching, which we were afraid he would dislike. He went away ; we never heard anything of him from that day to this.”

The next answer is important. The sixty labourers, it seems, who used to be out of work, have not been starved *out of* the parish, but have got employment *in it*. They have lost nothing, and have gained their independence.

“Did the change of system drive any of the parishioners into other parishes?”—“Certainly not. Not a single family of parishioners of the labouring class has removed ; and what is more remarkable is, that although the allowance formerly given to parishioners living at a distance was discontinued, none were brought home.”*

* Vol. ii. p. 233.

The following is a later report from the same gentleman of the continued improvement observable in his parish :—

“Is it observed that the personal condition of the labourers has, in any respect, changed, since the change of system of administering the poor-rates?”—“Decidedly. A labourer, formerly a pauper, came to the vestry not long since, to make inquiries respecting a house, in order to rent ; when he had retired, one of the farmers exclaimed how neatly he was dressed, and how good his coat was ; to which I answered, ‘ I can explain the reason of the change ; it is, that there is no longer a bonus offered by the vestry for rags and dirt. You all remember when ragged clothes were kept by the poor for the express purpose of coming to the vestry in them ; whereas the articles of clothing, which we sell to the poor at prime cost, have every year, since the establishment of a select vestry, been required to be of an improved quality.’ ”

“Do you mean to state that they purchase more expensive articles?”—“I do ; the blankets I send for from Witney are required to be larger and of a better quality ; and so of all other articles.”

“Do the labourers care to acknowledge to you that they wish to have the articles they purchase of a better quality?”—“Yes ; and I find them less jealous of acknowledging their real condition than formerly ; they now rather value themselves upon their respectability, than, as formerly, attempt to impose and extort money by pretended destitution.”

“Is their food better or worse than formerly?”—“I think better. The labourers have a meal of meat once a day, and there is hardly a cottage that has not a supply of bacon on the rack.”

“Has their general moral conduct improved, so far as you, as a minister, have observed?”—“It decidedly has ; and I state this as a magistrate, as well as a minister.”*

“Do you believe that the reduction of the poor’s rates, by the application of the new system, would be as great throughout the country as it has been in your parish?”—“I have no reason to doubt it. I think one-half, or two-thirds of the poor’s rates might be saved ; but judging from

my experience in my own parish, I should say, that even if no money were saved, the moral improvement, and increased comforts, of the community, to be derived from such a system, would more than compensate the trouble of the Legislature. I have often declared, both in public and private, that if all the money we have saved, (which was upwards of £15,000, in the first eight years,) had been thrown into the Thames, the parish at large would have been enriched by the acquisition of wealth, by the improved nature of the labour of the late rate receivers, independently of the moral improvement which has accompanied their improved frugality and industry.”*

The following is a report of the state of things at Cookham, furnished by a stranger who visited it on purpose to see with his own eyes the improvement that had been effected there :—

“ In company with Mr. Whately, I visited several of the residences of the labourers at their dinner-time, and I observed that in every instance meat formed part of the meal, which appeared to be ample, and was set forth in a very cleanly manner. One cottage in the village of Cookham, and the wife and family of the cottager, were most repulsively filthy and wretched in their appearance; and it was somewhat singular that this family was a pauper family, the head of which received an allowance in aid of his wages from an adjacent parish. I noticed some very trim hedges and ornaments in the gardens of the labourers, and it was stated to me that nothing of that sort had been seen in those places before. Mr. Knapp, the assistant overseer, stated that the labourers were no longer afraid of having a good garden, with vegetables and fruit in it; they were no longer ‘afraid of having a pig;’ and no longer ‘afraid of being tidy.’ Before the changes took place, he had been in public houses, and had seen paupers drunk there, and heard them declare in the presence of the rate-payers, that they (the paupers) had more strong drink than the rate-payers had; and *would* have it, and that the rate-payers could not help themselves.

“ At the time of my visit, the deposits in the Savings’ Banks from the parishioners of Cookham amounted to about £7,000. A considerable number of the present contributors had been paupers chargeable to the parish at the time of the old system being discontinued.”*

Mr. Russell, a magistrate, of Swallowfield, in riding through Cookham, was so struck with the appearance of comfort in that village, that he was led to make inquiries into the cause ; and the answer he received determined him to try the same plan in his own parish. The result of the experiment is thus described :—

“ A list of those men,” he says, “ who, before we had a Select Vestry, were dependent principally upon parochial relief, and who since the establishment of the Vestry have supported themselves, would comprehend almost every labourer in the parish, except those who were in constant employment, as carters, gardeners, or any other permanent capacity, and who consist, of course, of men of the best character and steadiest habits. On examining the book, I have detected the following fifteen persons as instances of the improvement that has taken place under our new system in the conduct and condition of the labourers.” He then goes on to describe particularly the former habits and the present condition of each of these fifteen persons. One never did any work at all ; he had no fixed home, but slept under a hedge ; the clothes which the parish gave him were made away with for food or liquor ; now he works steadily, has no money but what he earns, buys his own clothes, and keeps them, and sleeps with a roof over his head. Another, under the former system, was always dependent upon the parish ; his wife and children were as idle and as ragged as himself ; and so bad was their character for pilfering, that they were successively turned out of every cottage that was occupied by them ; now the man is in constant work : his family seems to be in comfort ; his rent is regularly paid,

and his garden well cultivated. A third had never borne a good character, and was some years ago imprisoned for robbing his master's garden; he was formerly always idle, and a constant burden on the parish; but since the change of system compelled him to depend on his own exertions, he has found work, and supported his family. And so on of the rest; all of them have been reclaimed from idleness, and some of them from vice: all are improved in comfort and in character; all have reason to be thankful for the change which, by taking away the prop on which they used to lean, has driven them to exert and maintain themselves.*

The same experiment has been tried in a few other places, and always with the same success. The comforts of the poor have been increased; wages have risen; providence has been encouraged, industry promoted, and the character of the labouring poor improved and elevated.

Mr. Faithful, Rector of Hatfield, in Hertfordshire, gives the following evidence:—

“Have the wages of the independent labourers been improved since the change of system?”—“Decidedly so; and the wages are higher here than in any parish in the neighbourhood, where a similar system has not been adopted. But I am decidedly of opinion, that the moral benefits obtained are much greater, much more important, than the pecuniary saving. Though as a minister, I have every day much to lament, I am sure that I should have infinitely more to lament had the old system of mal-administration continued. The most important effect of the new system is, first, in calling forth domestic sympathies and filial and paternal affections; and next, in creating provident habits, which is shewn in the increase of deposits in the Savings' Banks. Under the old system, when a child was left an orphan, it became, as of right, a pensioner to the parish, and owed

* Vol. ii. p. 249.

gratitude to none. I constantly see children left orphans, and now, under the influence of our law, that no one shall receive a pension out of the house, relations and friends come forward and support an orphan child, whom they would, without hesitation, throw upon the parish, if they could do so." *

A similar, but yet more striking statement is furnished by Mr. Borser, assistant overseer of the parish of Southwell, in Nottinghamshire :—

At the time of his settling in the parish, the character of the labouring population was very bad, and it continued to get worse and worse. The parish pay-room was a constant scene of disorder and violence. He, as overseer, was constantly threatened, and on three occasions was personally assaulted, for which the offenders were committed to the House of Correction. The labouring population was a terror to the authorities, and the troubles and burdens caused by them were increasing every year. Various plans were tried from 1813 to 1821, for remedying these evils ; but nothing produced any benefit till the New System was adopted.

" Since that time, the character of the population, and their habits, have entirely changed, and their former state has gradually passed into one of order, happiness and prudence. The prudence and economy, the desire of having comfortable homes, exhibits itself in a great variety of ways ; for instance, many now keep pigs, who did not, and would not have done so before, because the fact of their being known to possess them would have precluded them from any claim on the parish ; they are more anxious now to hire bits of garden ground for cultivation at odd hours ; their cottages are better furnished ; the men keep more at home, are less at alehouses, are more independent in their character altogether. He knows that they bring up their children with a scorn of pauperism ; does not believe that they would wish to change to their former state if they could ; believes so, because many of those who used to hate and revile him

as overseer, are now quite changed, have saved money, and placed it in the Savings' Bank, of which they know he is secretary, and never shew any jealousy of his being acquainted with the amount of their savings."*

And now some of you, I doubt not, will be ready to say, "Why should not some such plan be tried with us? this is evidently the thing we want; it seems good for all, for rich and poor alike, for farmer and labourer, for the man who pays rates and the man who has received them; one gains in money, another in character, and all in comfort; if we are going to have a change, by all means let Parliament pass a law to put every parish on the same footing with these parishes where such a wonderful improvement has taken place, and where the poor seem to be so much better off than in any other places that we know of." My friends, *this is exactly what Parliament has done.* The New Law, which we are going presently to be under, is framed on purpose to establish in every parish in England, a system just like that which has answered so well in these places that we have been speaking of, in Cookham, and Swallowfield, and the rest.

I. It is intended, generally, that Relief shall not be given to able-bodied males, that is, to those who are strong and able to work, except in a workhouse, where they will be kept to labour, and will have to submit to such regulations as the Commissioners shall appoint to maintain good order in the establishment.

* Vol ii. pp. 246-7.

You think perhaps, if this be so, that we must begin at once, and build very large workhouses, as the present ones will not hold a tenth part of the persons who will be forced into them. This, however, in all probability, will not be found necessary. When men find that they must choose between living in their homes, and being their own masters, on the one hand, and on the other, living in a workhouse, and being subject to the hourly control of others, they will bestir themselves a great deal more to find employment; they will take *hard* work rather than *none*; they will go further to seek it; if there is an excess of hands where they live, and a want of hands elsewhere, they will find it for their advantage to move, and so will better their own condition, and relieve their neighbours.

In fact, relief to the able-bodied, *to be safely given*, must be given upon conditions which make it a little irksome to receive it. The man who gets it, and gives up nothing for it, is tempted to come for it *too often* and *too soon*. It is not in human nature for a person to take all the trouble that he should take to find employment, and to take all the care that he might take to keep it, if he knows that, without so much ado, he will be maintained as well as he desires to be, and will have to sacrifice nothing of his liberty or comfort. The object of Poor Laws is simply to give relief to those *who really stand in need of it*, and the instant this object is lost sight of, the poor themselves become injured and corrupted by that which is intended for their good. Now it is quite impossible for a parish officer to know exactly the circumstances of every family; he might as well pretend to know with certainty the thoughts of every heart. But if relief be offered on conditions which are a little disagreeable, then we know that the man who *consents* to them is a

true man, and wants the help he asks for; the man who *objects* to them, and will not come under them, is plainly a good way from any thing like starvation. The law offers him *thoroughly good lodging, thoroughly good food and plenty of it, with the drawback of submitting to some restraint, and giving labour in return for his keep.* This he may have for asking as *soon*, and as *long*, as he chooses. If he can get *out of the workhouse* what he likes better than *this*, then the choice is his own; and we may be sure he will not pine himself, nor let his children pine, while such a ready escape from want is constantly open to him.

We repeat again that *for the poor themselves* some such regulation is necessary. It has been found by experience, in many places, that of the whole number who apply for relief, a great many more than half apply just because they do not like hard work. Give them relief *without this*, and they will take as much of it as they can get; offer them relief *with it*, and they will soon be off elsewhere to shift for themselves. One overseer of a populous parish, states in his evidence, that, on a particular occasion, he offered work in a stone-yard to 900 able-bodied paupers, at piece-work, upon terms at which they might have earned from 10s. to 18s. a week; *and out of the 900 only 85 remained.** Another speaks of having set 260 men to stone-breaking at 2s. a ton, and says they might, if they pleased, have broken a ton a day. If all had worked at this rate, he would have paid them £156. a week. As it was, *he paid them altogether £9. 18s. 2d. in six weeks.†* Now it is absolutely necessary to have some mode of trying the honesty of persons of this description; and no better and more effectual one has yet been devised than that which is proposed, of offering relief

* Vol. ii. p. 265.

† Vol. ii. p. 266.

which, *in point of quality*, no man in distress could think of quarrelling with, upon conditions a little unpleasant to all, and exceedingly disagreeable to persons of idle and irregular habits.

I know that many persons very much object to this regulation, because they say it will be so hard upon the deserving hard-working labourer, when he is out of work for a little while, to be driven from his comfortable home and shut up in a workhouse. Very, very few persons of this description, I expect, will be forced to apply to a parish at all. They have been slow to do it hitherto, and now there will, we are almost sure, be less occasion for it than ever. If hard times should come and drive them to it, let such persons know that the law is not meant to hurt them, but is intended expressly for their good, and will be made to bend in their favour as much as possible. For those who are commonly in the receipt of good wages, but have a stoppage of work for a short time, the New Law provides a mode of relief, which the *best* men (of whom we are speaking just now,) will like better than parish *pay*, that is, a parish *loan*; money will be lent them for their present necessities, which they will have to repay out of their earnings when they are able.

Besides, what is to prevent benevolent persons from coming forward with a little help at such times as those? I believe, in the only cases that could fairly be thought hard ones, where men are reduced to want *without any fault of their own*, many would be found to give something, and to give it cheerfully, that a neighbour, whom they knew and valued, might not be taken from his home. Such assistance will be worth a great deal more than much that is at present given to the poor. A *pound* for such an object ought to be more freely forthcoming from the numbers who can afford it

than a *shilling* for the common beggars of whom they know nothing, or some of their pauper neighbours of whom they know no good. If private charity, *which can safely act on such occasions*, and give to character and respectability its fair reward, does not step forward to supply what public charity has given hitherto, I, for one, shall be much disappointed, and shall be sorry that they who thus *spare their alms* should be *saved their rates*.

II. *When men are in work, they will not be allowed to receive part of their pay from their employer, and the rest from the parish; but will have to choose between working for a master who is to pay them all their wages, and working for the parish, who will wholly maintain them.*

That, you think, perhaps, will be very hard upon the labourer, because when the farmer is compelled to give full wages to all the men he employs he will not be able to employ so many, and then numbers who have been *partly* upon the parish hitherto, will be *wholly* upon it for the future. In fact, however, it is always found that the farmer, instead of employing fewer hands, employs more, and generally, as we have seen, at better wages. The *best* labourer will be preferred to the one who before seemed the *cheapest*, but who was in fact the *dearest*, as he took care to give but little work for his scanty wages, and cost the farmer a good sum yearly in rates beside. Industry, therefore, will have a better market to go to; and numbers of our labouring poor will be delivered from their present uncomfortable position, of serving two masters at once, being paid grudgingly by each, and giving thanks to neither. Thomas Pearce, you know, has told us that he thinks such a plan would make the farmers keep

more men *for constant*; * and constant work is the best thing in the world for the labourer.

The following statement of Mr. John Clark, a farmer of Bledlow, is very important on this point:—

“If I have the free use on Saturday night of £5. instead of paying it to the overseer for rates, as I used to do, I shall be able to lay this out in labour on my land in the next week. Whilst the labourer was half pauper and half labourer, he was like a man with two masters, and could do justice to neither; but now he feels that he is only a labourer he works hard and willingly. My 8s. wages will purchase for me labour sufficient to produce 10s. worth of crop; but with a pauper my 5s. paid will be a loss, for all the labour such a man would do would not be worth half-a-crown. With independent labourers the more I have in moderation, the more I make; but for the paupers, the more I have the more I lose. I will employ as many of the former, and as few of the latter, as I can. Ten independent labourers would do more good than five, whilst of paupers, five would be more desirable than ten.” †

Manufacturers too, we find, as well as agriculturists, have suffered from the practice of helping out wages with a parish allowance; and the law that forbids this for the future will be good therefore for the *stockinger*, as well as the *labourer*.

A gentleman living in Derbyshire gives the following evidence:—

“When I was overseer I refused to relieve able-bodied men working for other people, considering that, by relieving *them*, I was injuring the respectable part of the poor, by running down their wages. I found that some of the children in the workhouse were put out to the cotton and

* See p. 9.

† Vol. iii. p. 253.

silk mills, and, because they were workhouse children, the manufacturers paid them less wages than were given to the children of independent work-people, who, on applying for employment for their children at 2s. a week, were told, 'I only give that girl, who is older and bigger, 1s. 6d.' I determined therefore to take them away from the mills, and that they should do something, or even nothing, in the house, rather than injure the deserving poor. *I am certain that for every five shillings' loss that the parish sustained by this conduct, it gained five pounds, by assisting the respectable poor, and by preventing them from requiring parish relief.*"*

III. *The management of the poor will not be in the hands of individual guardians or overseers, as it has been ; but the Board of Guardians will act together for all the parishes contained in the Union*—that is, in our case, for Lutterworth and thirty-one contiguous parishes.

The poor man, therefore, will not be able to say any more, that the guardian refused to relieve him to save his own pocket ; for the guardian of Lutterworth will have no more to do with determining the Lutterworth cases, than the guardian of Bitteswell, or Cotesbatch, or Claybrook. All the other gentlemen on the Board, *including all the magistrates in the district*, will have the same voice in the matter ; and for *one* vote, therefore, which *can be* biassed by self-interest there will be *thirty* belonging to persons who have no end to gain by injustice. By this method the poor will be assured that they have fair play ; they will soon see that all are dealt with alike ; and no suspicion of partiality can attach to the decisions of the Board.

One of the worst parts of the old system was its uncertainty. There was no fixed principle, no settled rule of action.—The practice of neighbouring parishes, and often of

* Vol. li, p. 240.

two successive years in the same parish was widely different, for the *hard* guardian, as he was called, of to-day, might be succeeded by an easy one to-morrow. Each pauper compared himself with his pauper neighbours, and if they happened to get more, discontent and ill-will were added to his poverty, to make him doubly wretched. *Now, these evils at any rate, will be removed. There will soon be one uniform system of management prevailing through the country. Each individual will know what he has to expect, and, however he fares, will be better satisfied when he sees that all are upon the same footing.*

IV. No relief will be given but on the report of a person called the Relieving Officer, whose business it will be to acquaint himself with every particular relating to the circumstances and condition of the poor in his district, to receive applications for relief, and advise the Board of Guardians respecting them.

This will cut off at once most of the fraud that has been practised upon parish officers. When they had their own business to attend to, and it was nobody's work to look after the persons who applied weekly to them for relief, what could they do? They were compelled to act, and had to act in the dark. Very often they had none to check the pauper's story if it were false, or to back it if it were true. They had his word for it that he was in want, and if they sometimes trusted the deceiver, and sometimes doubted the man of honesty, who could blame them? The fault was not theirs, but the law's, which gave them more to do, with a paltry salary for their trouble, than any man could do well who had his own business to look after. There will be two Relieving Officers for our Union, who will be constantly

employed in visiting the different parishes assigned to them, and will have time to give a full and fair hearing to every case of real distress.

V. No more rents will be paid by the parish for able-bodied males or their families. All who are not inmates of the workhouse, will live in houses of their own, that is, taken and paid for by themselves.

Now I think some of you will say, "I wonder how he will make that out to be for our good. Surely a house rent-free is better than one for which I have to pay rent; and how can I pay rent, if I have only just enough to live on now that I pay none?"

My friends, I do not pretend to say that it will not be inconvenient to some of you to pay the rent which has been paid for you; but I do believe the practice is injurious to you upon the whole, and therefore that the law has done wisely in forbidding it; though I wish that it had proceeded, in this particular, more gradually. If you have your rent paid, you are like a prisoner in your own house. You cannot move but with the consent of another. Your dwelling may be out of repair and unwholesome, but you have not the tenant's common remedy against your landlord of threatening to quit, for the parish, in that case, may not please to give you another; or if the parish be your landlord you are completely at its mercy. Beggars, you know, it is said, must not be choosers; and so, if you are content to let the parish pay your rent, you must put up with any house they offer you, and stay in it as long as they require you.

But there is another serious evil connected with the practice of paying rents. It makes the first step in the poor man's descent from independence to pauperism so easy

a one, that it is a great temptation to him to begin to sink. For some time he has maintained himself entirely by his own labour. But he finds his neighbour has his rent paid by the parish, and he thinks it would be a nice help to him to have the eighteen-pence, which now goes for rent every week, to take to the shop instead; and so to the parish he goes, and prefers his request, and gets it granted. Now to all appearance he is the same man that he was before. Few people, besides the guardian and the landlord, know whether he pays his rent or not. But a change has taken place in the man's condition. He has become a pensioner on parish bounty. He has asked the *first* favour, and will be less unwilling to ask the *second*. *He has lost his character as an independent man*, and has begun a downward course, which leads, *if he pursue it to the end*, to dependence, degradation, discontent, and with them all, the very evil which he dreads, and seeks escape from, *poverty*.

Observe, this regulation applies only to *able-bodied males*. The Board of Guardians may, if they please, pay rent for widows, whether old or young, and for infirm people of both sexes. With all these cases they will be left to deal according to their discretion.

Such is a description, *for the accuracy of which I pledge myself*, of the main objects of the New Act. If you have heard things said about it, or seen things written about it, which make it a great deal worse, I tell you at once you are deceived if you believe them. Much has been said by ignorant men who did not understand the subject, and much has been written by wicked persons who wished to misrepresent it; and it is not surprising therefore if poor men, who must depend a good deal upon what is told them by

others in such matters, have had their fears excited and their minds misled.

YOU ARE MISTAKEN, *if you fancy that the object of the New Law is to oppress, degrade, or injure the poor man.*

Our governors and members of parliament are not so foolish as to suppose that, by doing this, they could get good for themselves or the country. What is best for the poor they are sure is best in the long run for the rich. In the body politic "the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you." All classes of the community are so closely bound together, that they cannot dispense with one another's help; and nothing that permanently injures and depresses one, can be either for the happiness or prosperity of the rest. In the inquiries, therefore, that have been made as to the working of the old Poor Laws, what was most anxiously sought, and most abundantly found, was information as to their effects upon the labouring classes; and if this proved, to the satisfaction of those to whom the government of the country is entrusted, that you, *as a body*, were suffering in your comfort, industry, morals, and general prosperity, would it have been either wise or kind of them to keep things as they were? Are they not bound rather to promote your good than to seek your favour? And will it not be the part of prudent, reasonable, loyal, and above all, of Christian men, to wait patiently and see whether the event does not prove them right?

YOU ARE MISTAKEN, *if you fancy that any hardship will be inflicted upon poor old widows, or that aged and infirm persons, who have lived in credit and respectability, and been*

reduced to poverty, without any fault of their own, will all be turned out of their homes into a workhouse.

If persons of this description are "wholly unable to work," it is expressly provided by the Act, that they may be relieved at their own homes. And if the helpless and friendless, who have none to take care of them, should be willing, in their declining years, to accept the asylum of a workhouse, they will find it a very different place from what it has been hitherto. They will live apart from the rest of the inmates, and will have comforts allowed them which the able-bodied will be denied, lest they should learn to like their situation too well. A marked line of distinction will be drawn between the infirm pauper driven there by misfortune, and the hale and hearty pauper dwelling there by choice; between the young, who are the better for work, and the old, who are past work: and the place which is a *house of labour* to the one class, will be a *house of rest* to the other.

The last thing desired by those who made the law, and the last thing intended by the Commissioners who have to carry it into effect, is to bear hard upon the sick, the aged, the infirm, or any class of persons who are fit objects for parochial charity. *These*, we all know, have very often been but poorly off under the old system. They have the best claim to relief, but they did not always get most of it. Many a strong young man has been living well at the parish expense, and half his parish-pay, perhaps, has gone in beer, while poor old creatures, who ought to have been looked to first, and dealt with most kindly, have had but a scanty pittance. Such persons, you may be sure, will not be any worse off. I believe that they will be better taken care of than they have been. Things will not be done in a corner,

as they used to be; but every case will be publicly heard and determined by the Board of Guardians; and I will not believe the person who shall tell me that a body, consisting of thirty or forty English gentleman and farmers, or tradesmen, are the men to conspire against poor old widows, or to show any thing of hard-heartedness towards those who are the fittest objects of compassion.

YOU ARE MISTAKEN, *if you fancy we are going to rush at once from one extreme to the other, and that the whole of the New Law will be brought into operation directly.*

It is intended, I have told you, *at last* to relieve none of the *able-bodied*, but persons *working for the parish and living in the workhouse*. But this rule will be enforced carefully and gradually. Those who have least claim to relief, and who are thought quite able to support themselves without it, will at once have it offered to them on these terms or none. Others, who have a better excuse for applying, will be more tenderly dealt with at first, and will, for a time, receive relief at their own houses in food. And thus care will be taken to accommodate the change to the circumstances of each parish, and to bring the whole country *by degrees*, under a system which, it is confidently expected, will be found, when fairly tried, to work well for all classes of the community; to give to the *employer* better labour for his money; to the *labourer* better wages for his work; to the *poor* contentment and competence, and to the *rich* the comfort of knowing that the millions raised in poor rates are no longer squandered upon the unworthy, but wisely and carefully dispensed among those to whom help is needful.

And now, my friends, I have told you the main things that you *are* to expect from the New Law, and some things that you are *not* to expect.

I know that, even upon this statement, many of you will think it has an appearance of severity about it, and bodes no good to the poor. I know many of you will look with suspicion upon arguments addressed to you by one whom you look upon, I suppose, as a rich man, and whose interests you fancy must be different from your own. I will not try to prove to you that it is not so; I will not ask whether all you know of me ought to lead you to give me credit for wishing your happiness and improvement; I will only beg of you to *wait awhile*, and not to conclude rashly, that with the little time and thought you have been able to give to a subject like this, and with the little field to which your observations extend, you must needs be better judges in this matter than all the wise and all the good men in both houses of Parliament, who were satisfied that in passing this bill they were doing a kindness to the poor. *TIME WILL SHOW*, or rather time *has shown*; for a great many parishes are under the New Law already, and they are *all of them* the better for it.

Labour has been more plentiful, as relief without labour has been more scarce. The man who was willing to work, therefore, has had work to do, and been pleased with it. And the man who would not work when he could help it, has been made to work, and been the better for it. The farmer has had less to pay in rates, and therefore has had more to spend in wages. The labourer has had to seek and please a master, or to work hard and fare hard in a work-house, and has consequently exerted himself to get work

and to keep it. The worthy have had the encouragement they deserve, and the indolent the stimulus they want.

In Bradfield Union, (I quote from a communication kindly furnished me by Mr. Hall,) comprising above thirty parishes in Berkshire, in the month of November last there was not a man out of employ; wages had uniformly risen; hands were so scarce, that a gentleman had tried in every parish in the Union to find two men to work in his own grounds, and could not.

It is computed, that this time last year there were scarcely fewer than 1,000 able-bodied men receiving parish relief in the four Unions of Bishop Stortford, Dunmow, Saffron Walden, and Ware. There are now in the same Unions not more than fifty men working on the Parish Account.

Farringdon Union, in Berkshire, comprises thirty parishes, and was formed last February. The farmers at first hoped for good from the new system, and said, that some change was absolutely necessary to save them from ruin, but they did not see how employment *could* be found for the able-bodied labourers. At the end of fourteen weeks, eighty-seven men had been sent into the workhouse, of whom two only remained. Of the other eighty-five, seventy-eight had got work in their own parishes, two more in parishes immediately adjoining, and out of the whole number not one had been compelled to move his family. Several of these labourers had before been on the parish books, except during harvest, for years together. Thus, when it became the interest of all to look after work, to ask for it, and to keep at it, work

was found, in a few weeks, for eighty men, and that in a neighbourhood where it was thought no more labour was wanted. The Commissioner naturally said to the farmers, "How is this? You told us there was no employment to be had; and here are all these men disposed of among you in this little time." Their reply was this,—“Why, sir, they were not worth a shilling a week before, and I would rather have had them off my ground than on; they were always dissatisfied and idle, corrupting the few good labourers that remained; whereas now they come to me with a totally different bearing, saying, the times are altered, and they have nothing but the workhouse to fall back upon. They promise that if work can be found for them, they will exert themselves to merit employment.”*

In describing to you the provisions of the New Law, I have told you the labourers will be gainers by that part of it, which requires that they should be wholly *on*, or wholly *off*, the parish. This is found already to be the case. The Assistant Commissioner who has visited Sussex reports the following cases as having come within his own knowledge:—

“In the parish of Storrington, in the Thakeham Union, a number of able-bodied men and boys were employed by farmers and others in the parish at very low wages, they living in the workhouse and receiving considerable relief all the while from the parish, under the plea that their wages were insufficient for their maintenance. This relief has now been taken away, and the men have been sent out of the house by the guardians of the Thakeham Union, on the principle that such relief is given to the farmer and not to the men. They have all since found work at an advance of wages, and work now as independent, instead of pauper, labourers.

* Vol. iii. p. 190-1.

"It has been the practice, more or less, in almost every parish, for mistresses of families to bargain with the parish officers to take females as servants, on condition of their receiving from the parish a weekly sum towards their maintenance. This the parish has been in the habit of doing, on the erroneous idea that they are thus saving the parish funds by keeping paupers *in part*, whom they would otherwise have to keep *wholly*. Since the formation of the Union these allowances have in all cases been struck off, *without any instance of a girl's being discharged by her mistress.*"*

The general improvement which has taken place in the condition of the labourer is proved by the following evidence relating to the parish of Risborough, in Buckinghamshire.

The overseer for the last year being asked what was the state of the parish during the months of March, April, and May, 1834, replies,

"There were in these months upwards of 100 able-bodied men on the parish. In the same months of 1835 there were no able-bodied men on the parish, and at the present time (June) we are in want of men."

The overseer for the present year was asked what was the reason of their parish being so distressed in the previous year; his answer was as follows:—

"It was because the labourers were lying on the parish; they liked that better than going to work. There is a man who has worked upon my farm all his life. I found him a little dishonest; he took some of my corn, and I discharged him. He then, the same day, went to the overseer. The overseer sent him on the road with the other men. This man told some of my men afterwards that he was never so well off in his life; he got more money, and could get wood,

* Vol. iii. p. 294-5.

three or four bundles a day, to take home to his family and sell. The paupers used to stand in the market-place. I have often seen them slink behind and get away, on seeing a farmer or any person coming, who they thought was going to employ them."

"What is your opinion upon the effect of paying in kind?"—"I think it protects the wives and families against the extravagance of their husbands; and I find that it induces the men to find work, because they get all money for their work. No one would believe the difference there is in the men, they are now so orderly, so willing and glad to do any thing. *We never have any words with them.*"

"Will the withdrawing of relief in aid of wages, in your opinion, affect the price of wages?"—"I think it will raise the price. The men must be had and kept, and if the parish will not pay, the farmer must. When we in our parish agreed to pay out of the rate, the wages went down immediately, and pauperism increased greatly. The wages have in fact, already been raised. A gentleman, in a neighbouring parish, has sent here to-day to say that he will give 12s. a week for good men, and some are at work for that sum; one of them is a single man. Before we have paid only 7s. wages as the highest sum."*

Now compare with this state of things, in which all are thriving, busy, and contented, Mr. Borser's description of Southwell when he first knew it, or Mr. Russell's of Swallowfield before he took that fortunate ride to Cookham and fell in love with what he saw there, or Mr. Hall's account of his interview with the men working on the roads, or the following strange-looking items in the parish accounts of Hampton Poyle, in Oxfordshire:—

"Paid for men and boys standing in the pound six days, 6s. 7d."

"W. Wheeler standing in the parish pound, 8s."

"J. Cartwright standing in the parish pound four days. 6s."†

* Vol. iil. p. 259-261.

† Vol. iil. p. 194.

(the meaning of this entry being, I suppose, that as the parties were relieved under pretence of their having no work, they were actually pounded like cattle, lest they should get some work,)—look at *this* picture, I say, and *those*, and then say whether the labourer is a wise man,—wise, I mean, *for himself*,—who clings to the Old Law, and cries out against the New one.

The rapidity with which an improvement sometimes takes place in the worst characters is well illustrated by the following story, which appears in the Report of Mr. Gulson, the Commissioner.

A man of the name of Thomas Pocock, unmarried, had been in the employ of Lord Augustus Fitzclarence, Rector of Mapledurham, for eight or nine months, earning 10s. a week, but left his situation at harvest time, in 1834, saying that he could better himself. He had then £2. in money, and two suits of clothes. Immediately after harvest he came to the parish, and got his weekly pay just the same as if he had not first thrown himself out of a good place, and then spent his summer earnings as fast as he got them. In the month of January last he went to the house of the overseer by night, when he and his wife were gone to bed, and declared he would have *money or blood*. Terrified by his threats they threw him half a crown from the window, which in the dark he did not immediately find, and vowed, therefore, that he would fire the premises unless the money were found for him, or some more given. At last the overseer's wife came down, searched with her candle for the money till she found it, and then returned to her bed.

Since that time the parish of Mapledurham has been brought under the New Law, and a workhouse is building for the reception of sturdy beggars, such as Thomas Pocock. But it seems he has no mind to be on the parish any longer on such terms. The overseer and he are going to part company, instead of coming to closer quarters. In the course of this last autumn he applied to the guardian of Mapledur-

ham for some work, who gave him first a job of turnip hoeing, and then, finding him steady and industrious, set him on reaping. One day since Pocock said, "I should like to keep on working for you, Sir, if you please. I should like to have a winter's job, Sir, if you please; thrashing, or anything." "Well, Tom," said the guardian, "this is a change. What's the reason of all this?" Tom laughed, "Come," said the guardian, "tell us the truth." "Why," said Tom, "*it's that great house up there that's now building*. I have now made up my mind to keep to regular work."*

One more extract I will give you respecting the working of the new system; and it shall be from a letter written to one of the Assistant Commissioners, by the Vice-Chairman of the Ampthill Union, in Bedfordshire.—The language shews the writer to be a member of the Society of Friends, a body of Christians noted alike for benevolence of character, and sobriety of judgment, both of excellent use in helping a person to form a right decision upon such a question as the comparative merits of the *old Law* and the *new* one.

"Ampthill,

"6th month 25, 1835.

"Respected Friend,

"A week or two ago, the Central Board of Poor Law Commissioners requested to be informed if we had proceeded so far in our arrangements in this Union, as to be able to furnish any facts relating to the operation of the New Poor Law, that would enable us to form a comparison with the former state of things.

"Although we cannot as yet give in a regular account that shall enable the Commissioners to draw a comparison with former years, it will, I am sure, be very satisfactory to them to learn, that already a very great change has been wrought in the general feeling and habits of the labouring poor, as is manifest to every one who has occasion to employ many hands; a change which is exemplified by a re-

mark made to me last week by Mr. Welch, a builder, who is employed extensively by the Duke of Bedford; he says 'the men are not like the same they were last year, for then they used to come and ask for work, and were generally better pleased with being refused than having it given them, but now they come begging for it, and are glad to keep their places.' I have heard a similar observation from many other persons, and can fully confirm it by my own experience, which is not a little.

"Notwithstanding these good effects, I would not advocate the New Law, if I believed it was oppressive to the poor. I have taken considerable pains to ascertain this point, and have had complaints brought to me by influential persons, *all of which have turned out to be grossly exaggerated, and sometimes totally false.* At some future time I may be able to enter more fully into the matter, with increased experience. I may, however, remark, that in my own acquaintance many who were prejudiced against the law are now of a different opinion, and I believe the time is not far distant when it will meet with the approbation of nearly all those who now oppose it.

"I remain,

"Thine respectfully,

"CHARLES MAY."*

Such, my friends, is the statement I have to present to you. I would willingly have made it shorter if I could; but upon a subject in which your interests and happiness are so much concerned, and on which it is very natural for your feelings and prejudices to be strong, I would rather take too much pains to set you right than too little. I know you will *receive* kindly what I have said, because you will not doubt its being *meant* kindly;—I trust many of you will do more,—will see that there is much of truth and reason in it, and will therefore wait patiently, in the hope that good will come of the change.

* Vol. iii, pp. 284-5.

Mind, I do not pretend to be a prophet, and therefore cannot tell what may happen to disappoint my expectations. God may send us a bad harvest next year, and then I do not tell you that bread will be cheaper than it is now. —Some of you may continue reckless and improvident as you have been, and then neither the New Law, nor any other law that Parliament can make, will give you prosperity and comfort. Some few of you have very large families, and to such persons a helping hand will need perhaps to be held out at first by neighbours, and especially by masters and employers. Do not therefore presume, from any thing I have said, that the change in the law will, of itself, bring plenty to your houses, or banish care and trouble from your doors, or make you happy in spite of yourselves. But it may do a great deal for you, though it does not do this.

IT WILL DO MUCH FOR YOU, if it makes you feel that comfort must be purchased by industry; and that sobriety, prudence, and economy, *save* more to the poor man, than the parish can ever *give* him.

IT WILL DO MUCH FOR YOU, if it forces you to exercise your man's privilege of calculation and forethought, to make some provision for a family before you have one, or to look forward, in your working days, to the time of sickness and old age.

IT WILL DO MUCH FOR YOU, if it sets you more at liberty than you have been; if, instead of being like prisoners in your own parish, afraid to leave it lest you should lose something that you get from it, you feel yourselves free to go wherever you can make the most of your labour, and have the best prospect of settling your families in comfort.

IT WILL DO MUCH FOR YOU, if it cuts off those occasions for bickering and heart-burning, which were afforded

by the parish pay-night, when relief was dispensed according to no certain rule, often upon no certain knowledge, and there was perpetual liability to deception on the one part, and to partiality and caprice on the other.

IT WILL DO MUCH FOR YOU, if it lessens those envyings and jealousies among yourselves, of which I have been pained and shocked to hear so much, which have grown and spread, I believe, among the peasantry of England as habits of dependence, and a craving after help have become natural to them, and will, I trust, be put off, when they shall again return to the manners of their fathers.

IT WILL DO MUCH, VERY MUCH FOR YOU, if it brings you to a healthier state of mind and feeling; if it makes you more contented in yourselves, and more kindly disposed towards others; if it leads you to lean *less* upon the help of man for your support, and to look *more* to your own efforts and God's blessing.

As your friend, I hope that some such fruit as this will, in the end, be produced by the change; *as your minister*, I look for such a result yet more anxiously. Laws, I know, will not reform the character, or change the heart; we must look for a higher power than the ruler's or the magistrate's to turn men from a sinful or ungodly life to the love and practice of righteousness. But I have deeply and painfully felt, that in the dispositions which were nurtured by the old system of Poor Laws, there was much that grievously hindered your moral and religious improvement; and a more wholesome state of law will, I hope and trust, prove, in this respect, a blessing to you, and a help and comfort to me.

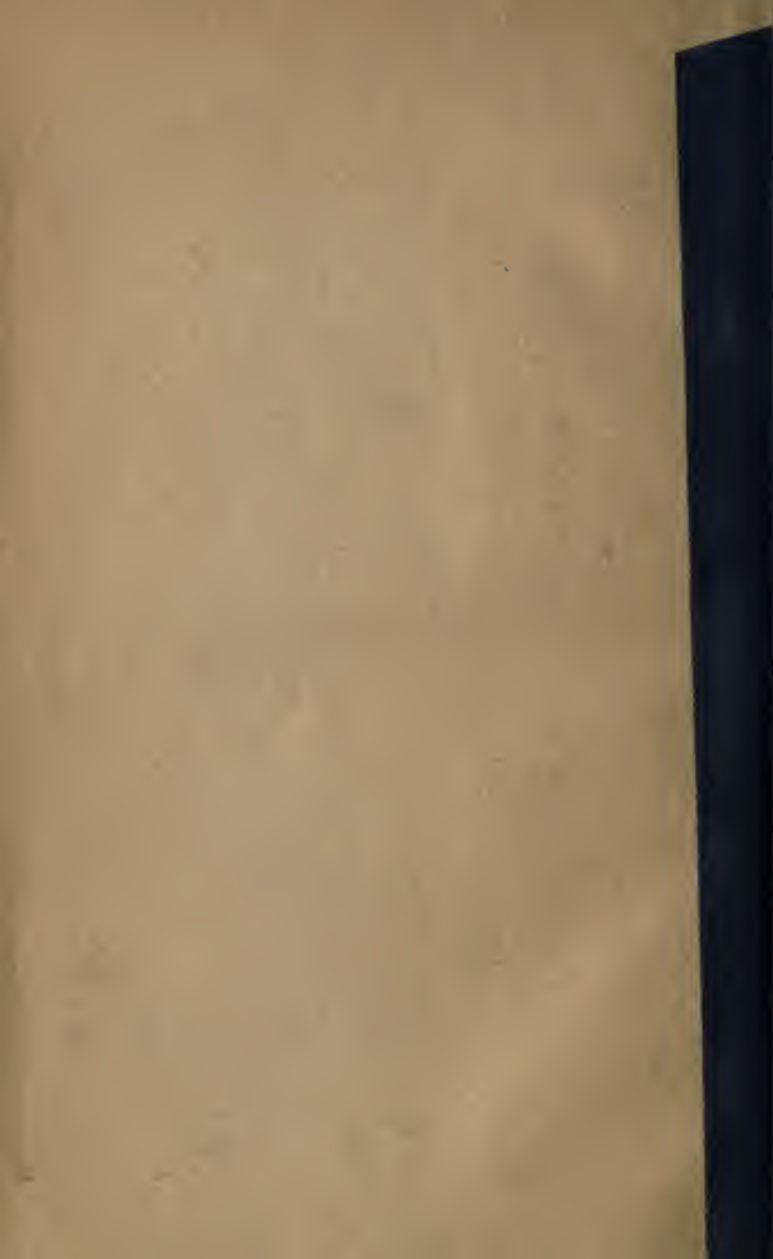
May God, my dear friends, bless you in *both* worlds! May He give you what is needful here, and bring you at last to that place where none are poor! May He teach you

that "godliness, with contentment, is great gain," solid, lasting, eternal gain. It can make the burdens of life light, and its duties pleasant. It lifts the possessor commonly above want, always above contempt. It sweetens the bitterest cup, and dignifies the meanest state. It is "profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." May this godliness and this gain be yours, is my earnest wish and most fervent prayer.

THE END.

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The new poor law the poor man's friend.

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